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AN OVERVIEW OF LONGITUDINAL FINDINGS ON A SPECIAL COLLEGE PROGRAM FOR DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS*

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The College Discovery Program (CDP) is a pioneer venture by The City University of New York in special college programs for disadvantaged students. From the very beginning, a research unit conducted a comprehensive, longitudinal program of studies which have made CDP the most thoroughly researched program of its type. It is the aim of this paper to present an overview of the first five and one-half years of the College Discovery experience, as documented by empirical findings from some of these studies. The findings may be especially timely in view of the rapidly growing movement to admit to college many disadvantaged students who were previously considered unqualified.

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The overview will sketch the broad outlines of the CDP experience beginning with its background, a description of the program itself, of the entering students, their early performance, their graduation or withdrawal, and follow-up of dropouts and survivors. It will also present some implications of the findings. The findings are based on several studies, using

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applications, high school and college records, and questionnaires as the principal data sources.

1. Background of College Discovery

Because The City University of New York has never charged tuition to matriculated students and has always admitted qualified students regardless of income, it has traditionally been the principal institution where low-income students in New York City could obtain a college education. For many years, however, the lack of enough places to meet the demand led to the use of high admissions standards which disqualified many potential students who, although they could still enter as non-matriculants, had to attend evening classes and pay tuition. In recent years the growing conviction that the system discriminated against the poor, particularly those from "minority" groups, led The City University to inaugurate special programs such as College Discovery and SEEK, and eventually to a policy of totally open admissions in 1970. College Discovery was the first of these special programs and its evolution from a highly selective program to an entirely unselective one paralleled the evolution of The City University as a whole, as well as much of American higher education today.

2. Description and Growth of the Program

CDP students enter the community colleges of The City University system and may later continue in the senior colleges. They attend the same classes as regular matriculants but their identity as CDP students is not made known to the regular matriculants or to the teachers. They receive supportive services such as remediation, tutoring, counseling and stipends, and may take a reduced credit load and extra time to graduate. The program at each college is unique, with its own director, its own practices, etc., even though there is a coordinator for the entire program and all the colleges have certain services and practices in common.

CDP has grown from 231 students at two colleges in 1964 to 1,868 students at six colleges (plus several hundred more in senior college) in 1969. The average number of CDP students per college was thus over 100 in 1964, and nearly 300 in 1969. By 1970,a grand total of 4,650 students had been admitted,and the program has continued under the open admissions policy.

3. Changing Admission Standards

Academically, College Discovery changed from a selective to an unselective program. In The City University, admission standards for entering freshmen are lower for the community colleges than for the senior colleges, and students accepted for

CDP during its first four years were those who narrowly missed qualifying as regular matriculants to the community colleges. These students were carefully screened. They were nominated by their high school principals or guidance counselors, had fairly strong backgrounds in academic subjects (usually 12 credits or more), had academic averages approaching those of the regular matriculants, and generally showed evidence of academic promise. They also had to have low incomes. If accepted for CDP, they were not allowed to enroll in "career" programs leading to terminal two-year degrees, but only in "transfer" programs in which they would take their junior and senior years at senior colleges and then obtain bachelor's degrees.

The admission standards remained essentially intact until 1968, when they dropped considerably. Nominations were no longer used, the required number of academic credits could be as low as one, the minimum academic average was 69, and students could enroll in career programs as well as transfer programs. A year later there was a further drop: in 1969 the only academic requirement was high school graduation or its equivalent, and students were selected at random. The only requirement that did not change was that of low-income.

4. Changes in the Student Population[1]

The changes in admission standards were accompanied by changes in the make-up of the entering freshmen population, in the direction of poorer levels of college preparedness.

One of the major changes was the shift from academic to non-academic backgrounds. Among students entering between 1964 and 1967, more than seven-tenths had been in the academic diploma track in high school, compared with one-tenth from the general diploma track. By 1969 both groups were equal, each with one-third of the new students. There was also an increase in vocational track students. The general and vocational tracks, however, are both weak in academic requirements. Relatively few students came from the technical or commercial tracks or had equivalency diplomas.

Another reflection of the change in admission standards was the decline in the high school academic average of entering students. From 1965 to 1967 the mean was approximately 75.

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[1]Most of the findings in this section are based on two reports by the Research and Evaluation Unit of The City University of New York: Dispenzieri, A., Giniger, S. and Weinheimer, S. Characteristics of the College Discovery Program Students: 1964-1967, July 20, 1968. Dispenzieri, A., Giniger, S. and Tormes, Y. Characteristics of the College Discovery Program Students: 1968 Entering Class Compared with 1964-1967 Entering Classes, November 1, 1969.

In 1968 it was again 75, but represented far fewer academic credits than previously. In 1969, when there were no academic standards for admission, the mean average dropped to 70 and half the entering students had averages below 70.

Additional information on the academic character of the 1969 class is provided by a survey of the remedial needs of these students. The mean reading level at four of the colleges was tenth grade, or in the lowest quartile of national freshmen norms of the Nelson-Denny and Cooperative English tests, with thirty percent of those tested on the Nelson-Denny scoring below ninth grade level. From one-third to four-fifths of the students were judged to need remediation in writing skills. Although no comparable data were compiled for students who entered CDP prior to 1969, many have taken remedial courses in reading and writing and in mathematics and languages as well. The similarity of the 1969 CDP class to many open admissions students was demonstrated by tests administered to the entire City University entering class of 1970: approximately three-fifths or more of the students accepted for the community colleges were judged to need "some" remediation in reading and mathematics, with smaller percentages requiring "intensive" remediation in these subjects.[2] The City University and CDP studies document

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[2]These findings were reported in the New York Times of November 14, 1970.

the degree of academic handicap that many students in programs such as CDP and open admissions bring to college, with implications for the extent of remedial and supportive services required.

Although changes have also occurred in the demographic make-up of the CDP student body, the principal target groups for College Discovery, the City's blacks and Puerto Ricans, have always been well represented. Blacks born in the United States constituted nearly half of the students entering between 1964 and 1968, and increased to three-fifths in 1969. Puerto Ricans have usually made up one-fourth of the students, but their proportion decreased to one-fifth in 1969. Native-born whites have always been a minority in CDP; they comprised one-sixth of most classes and less in 1969. The other ethnic groups--the foreign-born blacks, foreign-born whites, Asians and Spanish-speaking students other than Puerto Rican--together were one-seventh of the 1964-1967 classes,but less in the classes of 1968 and 1969. While the CDP population has always been predominantly black and Puerto Rican, in 1969 the blacks became the majority group while the other groups diminished proportionately.

The ratio of malesto females also changed recently. Between 1964 and 1967 there was usually a small majority of males, or at least an equal ratio, but females increased to slightly more

than half in 1968 and in 1969. Most blacks entering CDP have been women while the other ethnic groups have been mostly male.

Although the findings on the academic and demographic characteristics of entering students pertain to College Discovery as a whole, there have been differences among the colleges as well as differences within each college from one entering class to another.

5. Early College Performance

The early college performance of CDP students was not as good as that of regular matriculants at any of the community colleges. However, in the colleges where CDP students took the proper "mix" of reduced credit load and increased remediation, their performance was not only almost as good as that of regular matriculants, but considerably better than that of CDP students who took nearly full credit loads and minimal remediation. The proper "mix" appears to be 6 or 7 credits plus 2 remedial courses. These findings are based mainly on a study of the first semester performance of the September 1968 entering class.[3]

To begin with, CDP students enrolled in fewer credit courses and more non-credit (i.e., remedial) courses than the regular matriculants and this occurred at each of the six community colleges. Regular matriculants usually took a full credit load and the average number of credits they attempted was fairly uniform among the colleges (14 to 16). The average credit load

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[3] Dispenzieri, A., Giniger, S., Weinheimer, S. and Chase, J. First Semester Performance of College Discovery Program Students and Regular Matriculants: September 1968 Entering Class. The City University of New York Research and Evaluation Unit, January 15, 1970.

of CDP students, however, depended very much on the college, ranging from nearly half a load to nearly a full load, and the differences in average credit load between the regular matriculants and the CDP students ranged from 2 to 10 points per college. With respect to non-credit courses, CDP students usually attempted one or two of these, again, depending on the college they attended, while regular matriculants seldom took any non-credit courses. It should be noted, however, that the credit and remedial loads of both CDP students and regular matriculants reflect college policies rather than student choices.

Having attempted fewer credits, CDP students therefore completed fewer credits than regular matriculants. However, they also completed a lower <u>percentage</u> of the credits they attempted. They also received lower grade-point averages. On the negative side of the coin, they failed, did not complete or withdrew from <u>greater</u> percentages of the credits they attempted than did the regular matriculants. Although some of the differences were small, the poorer performance of CDP students occurred at all six colleges. (Table 1 presents the range among the colleges for each of these measures.) The 1966 and 1967 classes, which were more carefully screened than the 1968 class, also had poorer performances than regular matriculants in terms of grade-point averages.

The consistently poorer performance of CDP students in spite of reduced credit loads and increased remediation suggests that these practices were ineffective, but closer examination of the data suggests that they actually helped considerably. The six colleges form a natural experiment for testing the effects of reduced credit loads and increased remediation, because at three of them CDP students attempted half a full credit load and two remedial courses, while at the other three colleges they attempted almost a full credit load and less than one remedial course (on the average) CDP students at the first three colleges not only performed better than those at the other three, but their work was almost as good as that of the regular matriculants. CDP students at the first three colleges, for example, almost overtook those in the second group in the number of credits completed, attempting 6 less but completing only 2 less; they also achieved substantially higher grade point averages and completed substantially higher percentages of credits attempted as well as remediation attempted. In the first three colleges, CDP students attained almost identical grade-point averages to those of regular matriculants, as well as highly similar percentages of credits completed and almost identical percentages of credits failed, while the corresponding measures for the other three colleges show

considerably poorer performance by CDP students than that of regular matriculants (Table 2).

Although more research is needed, the findings suggest that an optimal first-semester mix for these students is approximately half a full credit load and two remedial courses. More research is also needed to determine how much each aspect -- the reduced credit load or the increased remediation -- contributes to the improved performance, but at the very least, students such as those in CDP should not be overloaded with credit courses early in their college careers. Further, additional research is needed to determine whether reduced credit loads and/or remediation should be continued beyond the first semester and, if so, for whom and for how long, but the fact that reduced credit loads are strongly indicated for at least the first semester implies that a necessary part of programs such as CDP and open admissions is lengthened time until graduation.

6. Graduation and Attrition

By February 1970, 530 CDP students had graduated from community college, 468 had entered senior college and 99 had graduated from senior college. Enough time had elapsed, in fact, for nearly every student in the first three entering classes to have graduated or withdrawn from community college, so that the graduation and attrition rates for these classes were almost

final, except for a small number of students who were still enrolled. Approximately one-third (35%) of the students in these classes had graduated from community college, the other two-thirds having withdrawn. The graduation rates differed according to college and according to entering class, but on the whole were fairly uniform. The principal difference was that the rate at one college was twice as high as those of the other four: 58%, compared with 28% to 32%.[4] The rates, however, were influenced by college policies. The college with the highest rate removed failures from students' records if the failed courses were re-taken and passed. At the college with the lowest rate, budgetary pressures caused the premature termination of several students who otherwise would have continued. The "graduates," incidentally, included students who transferred to senior college before graduating from community college, as well as those who attained their community college degrees.

The fact that two-thirds withdrew while one-third graduated from community college raises the question as to what the "norm"

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[4] The sixth college did not yet have any graduates by February 1970, having admitted its first CDP class in September 1968.

should be for programs such as CDP. At a City University community college where data were available, approximately 50% of the regular matriculants graduated compared with 30% among CDP students in the same classes. Science[5] reported that in the public higher education system of California, which has had open admissions for over 10 years, attrition in recent freshmen classes had reached two-thirds in the first year alone. (The article commented that the "open door" had become a "revolving door.") The University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, a senior college, considered a one-third graduation rate "realistic" in planning its "Experimental Program" for disadvantaged students, but the program is still too new for any students to have graduated.[6] On the whole, however, it is probably too soon for "norms" to exist as yet for programs such as CDP, in view of the short time such programs have existed and the dearth of evaluative research.

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[5]California Higher Education: The Master Plan Faulted. Science, Vol. 164, May 16, 1969, pp. 811-813.

[6]Menzel, Dennis. Theoretical and Administrative Issues Related to Educational Opportunity Programs. Paper presented at a symposium, Support Services for Disadvantaged College Students, American Educational Research Association, Minneapolis, Minnesota, March 1970.

Since students in programs such as CDP take reduced credit loads, one question about such programs has to do with how long students take to graduate. Virtually all (95%) College Discovery students who graduated from community college by August 1969 did so within six semesters after entering, three-fourths did so within five semesters, and half did so within four semesters. Although comparable figures are not available for regular matriculants, it is known that they, too, often take longer than two years. A related question would be: How long do CDP drop-outs take to withdraw? As of February 1969 approximately three-fifths of the students who entered CDP had withdrawn within two years. One out of six did so during the first semester, one-third in the first year, one-fourth in the second year, and one-tenth after that.

If a CDP student managed to graduate from community college, he was fairly certain to enter senior college and highly likely to graduate. In fact, <u>community</u> college graduation appears to be the key to <u>senior</u> college graduation. At each community college, close to 90% of the CDP graduates went on to senior college for their junior and senior years. In the 1964 class, the only one existing long enough for a reasonable number of its students to complete senior college, 69% of the students who entered senior college had completed it by February 1970. Assuming that

some of those who were still enrolled eventually graduate, it is highly probable that the rate will rise to 75% or more.

Since senior college graduation was the original goal of College Discovery, the next question would be: what percent of the students who entered community college graduated from senior college. The 40 senior college graduates from the 1964 class constituted 17% of the original community college entering class; assuming additional graduations by some of its members who were still in senior college as of February 1970, the rate may rise to approximately 20%. While this means that close to one-fifth of those who entered in 1964 will have achieved the goal of the program, it also means that the remaining four-fifths will not have achieved it.

The findings on graduation are based almost entirely on the first three entering classes which were much stronger in their high school academic backgrounds than the 1968 and 1969 classes. Further analysis of the graduation data indicates that the weaker academic backgrounds of the newer students will result in poorer graduations rates in the future. Among CDP students who had graduated from community college by August 1969, for example, only 10% of those from the general diploma track graduated, compared with 32% for those from the academic track. In addition, those with higher academic averages in high school also had higher

community college graduation rates than those with lower averages. Yet in recent entering classes, students from the general diploma track and those with low academic averages increased considerably, while there were marked declines among students from the academic diploma track and among those with higher averages. If the graduation pattern of the earlier classes persists, the changing population mix could mean that recent CDP classes may have lower graduation rates than the 1964-1967 classes. A step that may counteract this possibility is a 1970 policy change by the New York City Board of Education, abolishing the different diploma types and strengthening the academic requirements in programs in which they were previously weak, such as the general and vocational tracks.

A final point of interest on graduation from community college has to do with the rates of the different ethnic groups. The principal target groups of College Discovery -- the native-born blacks and the Puerto Ricans -- graduated at approximately the same rate as the native-born whites: close to one-fourth each. Among "other Spanish-speaking" and foreign-born blacks, one-third of each group graduated. Among Asians and foreign-born whites, half of each group graduated.

7. Follow-Up

Two follow-up studies were conducted, one for the 1964 entering class and one for the 1965 class.[7] Each was based on interviews with survivors and dropouts from College Discovery approximately two years after they had entered the program and each had generally similar findings. At the time that the follow-up studies were completed, the long term trends in graduation and attrition had not yet crystalized. The fact that the final attrition rate showed that two out of three students did not graduate from community college, and that these were the carefully screened students who entered from 1964 to 1966, heightens the importance of the follow-up findings. These findings provide the only available information on what the dropouts did after they left the program, why they dropped out, what their experience had been while they were in the program, and whether they benefitted from CDP in spite of having withdrawn from it. At the time the follow-up interviews were held, approximately half of each class had left the program.

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[7]Dispenzieri, A., Giniger, S. and Friedman, M. A Follow-Up Study of the Experiences and Reactions of the Students in the First Entering Class of the College Discovery Program. The City University of New York Research and Evaluation Unit, July 20, 1968. Also: Dispenzieri, A., Tormes, Y., Long, L., Giniger, S., Kweller, I. and Weinheimer, S. A Follow-Up Study of the Experiences and Reactions of Students in the 1965 Entering Class of the College Discovery Program. The City University of New York Research and Evaluation Unit, April 1969.

Nearly everyone who withdrew engaged in some type of "gainful" activity after leaving the program. Close to one out of five entered the armed services, a few people joined the Peace Corps, and several women became housewives. But most of the dropouts found jobs, the great majority of them clerical positions.

College Discovery apparently gave many dropouts a sense of educational momentum. One out of three continued to go to college, generally as non-matriculants in evening classes while working during the day. A great majority intended to resume their education the following year, including dropouts who did not continue at college as well as those who did. Educational and vocational ambitions remained high: 85% of the dropouts in the 1964 class expected to achieve bachelor degrees or higher, and most still aspired to professional occupations such as teaching, law and social work which often require graduate degrees.

In view of the dropouts' high educational and occupational ambitions, why did they leave the program? For many dropouts the problem was one of poor motivation: loss of interest, failure to apply themselves and confusion about goals; some, for example, were not sure whether they needed college while others were sure that they did <u>not</u> need college for attaining their goals. Another major reason for dropping out had to do with family problems: disorganized family situations, family opposition or

indifference to college, or students being burdened with family responsibilities that interfered with school. For many dropouts, financial problems were part of their family problems: these students wanted to earn money to help their families. A number of students wanted to earn money for the opposite reason - to become independent of their families, or because they needed to support themselves and could not combine this with full-time college. Another type of problem had to do with the college or program the student was assigned to: he did not like his program but had no choice in the matter, or his college was too far from home. Dropouts also suffered from personal and psychological problems such as emotional disturbance, immaturity or lack of self-confidence.

These reasons for withdrawing from College Discovery were given not only in both follow-up studies but also in a series of personal interviews conducted in 1968. They were further corroborated by student reports as to the types of problems they encountered in college: dropouts were more likely than survivors to report family problems, financial problems and personal problems. They indicate the nature and extent of non-academic problems among CDP students and the need for effective assistance with these problems.

Dropouts were more likely than survivors to report academic difficulties. In certain respects dropouts were not as fully involved in college work as the survivors. The dropouts made less use of services and facilities such as tutoring, stipends, the college library, and college study space. Most important of all, perhaps, is that the dropouts spent considerably less time studying. Two-thirds of the dropouts spent less than 15 hours a week in studying while nearly two-thirds of the survivors spent more than 15 hours per week in studying. Both groups, in fact, considered studying to be a serious problem, to the extent that four out of five dropouts and survivors in the 1965 class felt that they should have taken a course in study habits while still in high school. The lower involvement in college on the part of the dropouts could well have contributed to the academic difficulties they reported, but may in turn have been influenced by their motivational, personal, financial and family problems. There is evidence that some of the dropouts tried very hard not to leave the program: those who used the tutoring services used them for more courses and for many more hours than did the survivors.

Most dropouts felt favorably toward the program in spite of having left it, and even though some left because of academic failure. Most felt that they had benefitted from being in the

program chiefly by a broadening of their intellectual and career horizons. The survivors felt that they had gained in self-confidence.

No further follow-up was done of the 1964 and 1965 entering classes,but information is available which permits some fairly definite inferences as to what became of these students. The fact that the final attrition rates for the 1964 and 1965 classes were approximately 70% and 60%, respectively, means that many students who survived their first two years dropped out eventually, and that virtually none of those who had withdrawn during their first two years ever fulfilled the educational or occupational aspirations they expressed at the time of the follow-up studies. On the other hand, it is also known that most of the survivors -- several hundred of them -- graduated from community college, that nearly all of these graduates entered senior college and that most are likely to attain their bachelor's degrees. A number of the CDP senior college graduates are known to have gone on to graduate and professional schools,while others have taken responsible positions. Many of the dropouts who took clerical and other white collar positions might be in occupationally higher levels than they would have attained had they not attended college.

No research has been done on the later occupational history or other aspects of the lives of the College Discovery dropouts or graduates beyond the two-year follow-up of the 1964 and 1965 classes or beyond the subsequent school history of those who continued in college. Since the findings of CDP research as well as other data strongly indicate that the majority of students in programs such as CDP and open admissions will not complete even their first two years of college, and since the stakes that these programs represent to millions of individuals and to society as a whole are so high, long range follow-up research seems all the more crucial.

8. Conclusion

On the basis of findings presented in this overview, seven conclusions seem reasonable:

1. Students in programs such as College Discovery and open admissions do not perform as well as students who meet traditional college entrance requirements, in measures of ongoing performance as well as graduation, and should not be expected to perform as well.

2. A reasonable graduation rate for CDP-type students would seem to be one-fourth or more for community college graduation and one-sixth or more for senior college graduation.

3. The performance of these students in college can be considerably improved by the skillful use of supportive services, particularly the proper mix of reduced credit load and increased remediation; CDP research suggests that half of a full credit load and two remedial courses seems to be optimal for the first semester. The findings also indicate that students need to spend more time studying and to study more effectively; a course in study habits as well as other means might be used for these purposes.

4. Strengthened academic training in high school together with more students entering non-academic (i.e., "career") programs in college might help to overcome the academic shortcomings of many formerly unacceptable students who now enter college under programs such as CDP and open admissions.

5. Many students require assistance with personal and family problems and many approaches toward this should be tried and critically evaluated, but to some extent the problem may be beyong the capacity of college to handle.

6. Considerably more research is required, particularly in the areas of program practices, supportive services (counseling, tutoring, etc.) and long-range follow-up.

7. Some of the College Discovery experience is relevant to the recommendation by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, and to the generally growing belief, that some type of college education should be made available to all who desire it.

TABLE 1

Range of First Semester Performance Measures of College Discovery Students and Regular Matriculants Among Six Community Colleges (September 1968 Entering Class)

	CDP Students	Regular Matriculants
Mean credits attempted	6.0 -13.3	13.7 - 16.4
Mean remedial courses attempted	0.2 - 2.0	0.1 - 0.4
Mean grade-point average	1.4 - 2.1	2.0 - 2.3
Mean credits completed	4.3 - 8.7	11.1 - 13.5
Mean % credits completed	38.7 -75.5	80.4 - 88.2
Mean % credits failed	5.9 -19.8	5.4 - 8.6
Mean % credits incomplete	2.4 -10.9	0.6 - 3.1
Mean % credits withdrawn from	4.9 -34.7	2.8 - 12.1

TABLE 2

Selected Measures of First-Semester Performance of College Discovery Program Students (CDP) and Regular Matriculants (RM) by Credit-Remediation Load Attempted by CDP Students (September 1968 Entering Class)

	Colleges Where CDP Students Attempted:					
	Low Credits and High Remediation			High Credits and Low Remediation		
	A*	B	C	D	E	F
Mean Credits Attempted						
CDP	7.1	6.8	6.0	11.9	13.3	11.3
RM	13.7	14.0	16.4	14.3	15.5	14.5
Mean Remedial Courses Attempted						
CDP	1.8	1.8	2.0	0.9	0.8	0.2
RM	0.4	0.4	0.1	0.3	0.3	0.1
Mean Grade Point Average						
CDP	1.9	2.1	1.9	1.6	1.4	1.4
RM	2.0	2.3	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1
Mean Credits Completed						
CDP	5.3	5.1	4.3	8.7	8.2	4.4
RM	11.1	12.4	13.4	11.7	13.5	11.6
Mean % of Credits Completed						
CDP	75.5	75.2	70.9	72.9	62.2	38.7
RM	81.2	88.2	81.5	81.4	87.5	80.4
Mean % of Credits Failed						
CDP	7.0	5.9	9.6	19.8	17.0	15.7
RM	6.6	5.6	5.4	8.6	7.9	6.9
Mean % of Remedial Courses Completed						
CDP	78.4	68.5	64.1	54.3	61.2	25.0

*Letters of the alphabet are substituted for names of colleges.